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6 THE DECLINE OF THE OVERSEAS STATION FLEETS:
THE UNITED STATES ASIATIC FLEET AND THE SHANGHAI CRISIS, 1932,

10 Stephen S. Roberts

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*The Decline of the Overseas Station Fleets:
The United States Asiatic Fleet and
the Shanghai Crisis, 1932*

BY STEPHEN S. ROBERTS

This report discusses which

THE Manchurian crisis is often cited as the main event that upset the previous balance in the Far East between Japan, China and the Western powers, leading ultimately to at least the Pacific phase of World War II. However, it is not so often realized that the crisis also had its naval side, centering around the Shanghai incident of 1932, and that it marked the end of a form of naval activity that had predominated in the Far East since the arrival of the Europeans four centuries earlier.

One of the historic missions of naval forces has been the protection and promotion of trade in peacetime in 'uncivilized' parts of the world. In the sixteenth century the Portuguese used naval squadrons to gain and keep a trade monopoly in the Indian Ocean, and in the following centuries squadrons belonging to other European powers followed them. By the nineteenth century the major navies, including the small but active United States navy, maintained small 'station fleets' scattered around the world. In the period from 1815 to around 1880 these overseas cruising forces were the most active portion of the major navies, drawing off large amounts of men and money from the relatively inactive battle fleets. Towards the end of the century the trend began to reverse back towards the battle fleets, a move justified in 1890 by Mahan's revival of the theory of the battle fleet as the main element of naval strength. The battle lines of World War I appeared to be conclusive evidence of the triumph of the new ideas.

However, it was not so much the new ideas that had triumphed but new world conditions, and where the old conditions remained, so did the old form of naval forces. The end of the nineteenth century was

marked by a contraction of the field of activity for the station fleets, for as European colonial administrations spread over all of Africa and much of Asia, the seagoing station fleets were no longer needed in these areas to keep order. However, a few parts of the world remained unaffected, notably Latin America and China; and, despite the demands of the battle fleets for all available resources, station fleets continued to be maintained in these areas. Latin America was a special case, for after around 1900 only one power, the United States, maintained permanent forces there.¹ But the old system survived with all its vigor in China, where the station fleets of the major European powers were joined by those of Japan and the United States. In 1932 the United States Asiatic Fleet consisted of one modern cruiser, *Houston*, nineteen destroyers, twelve submarines and nine river gunboats and was exceeded in size only by the British squadron with its five cruisers and supporting smaller craft. Even in the early 1930's nobody contested the need for these forces: China was in chaos, prey to marching armies and local tyrants, and Europeans, Americans and Japanese needed the protection of naval forces in order to be able to live in China and conduct business there. As late as 1927 seagoing ships had opened fire to protect foreign nationals at Nanking, and such actions by river gunboats were a relatively common occurrence.

However, in the 1930's the end finally came for the station fleets in China. It came when foreign powers stopped directing their station fleets against the local situation with its insignificant military resources and started directing them against themselves or, more specifically, against the Japanese. This brought into the naval balance the entire Japanese navy, based within easy reach of the China coast, which could only be counterbalanced by the diplomatic and geographic manipulation of the European and American battle fleets. The key event in this change was the Japanese assault on Shanghai in January 1932, shortly after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese incident in Manchuria. It was then that the American station fleet commander, Admiral Montgomery Meigs Taylor, (as well as his European colleagues) first saw the extent of the changes that had taken place. He found that the trouble, instead of being caused by the Chinese, was being stirred up mainly by the actions of the Japanese; and he found that he was being asked by his Secretary of State, Henry L. Stimson, not only to carry out the traditional mission of protecting Americans in Shanghai, but also to use his forces in a

¹ Richard Millett, 'The State Department's Navy: A History of the Special Service Squadron, 1920-1940,' *THE AMERICAN NEPTUNE*, XXXV (1975), 118-38.

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diplomatic demonstration against Japan which he did not fully understand and did not believe was militarily credible.²

The initial phase of the Manchurian incident, in late 1931, raised no problem as to naval response. Admiral Taylor and Secretary Stimson felt that the Asiatic Fleet should avoid any involvement in the Sino-Japanese dispute. Both reacted quickly when in October an American newspaper reported that United States submarines had been sent to Chefoo, a port in the Yellow Sea, in anticipation of immediate war. The submarines were in fact making their annual move from their summer bases in the Yellow Sea to winter bases in the Philippines, but Stimson, although fully aware of the routine nature of their visit, ordered them out of Chefoo and south of Shantung at once. Taylor immediately complied, and then took pains to publicize the routine nature of the fleet's movements as the remaining ships moved south. By the end of October, the whole fleet was out of China except the gunboats and the usual three or four destroyers stationed in ports along the coast to protect Americans against sudden disorders.

However, the similar response of Taylor and Stimson to the incident of the submarines concealed a fundamental disagreement between the two in their interpretation of the Far Eastern crisis as a whole. Stimson had come to see the Japanese use of force in Manchuria as a challenge to two of the moral principles upon which the postwar world order rested: the sanctity of treaties (particularly the Nine Power Treaty of 1922 in the case of the Pacific) and the peaceful settlement of disputes; and he was determined that somehow the Japanese action had to be stopped. In October, at the time of the submarine incident, he was hoping that the liberals in the Japanese government would bring the military in Manchuria under control and felt that the best the United States could do was to maintain a low profile and avoid any action that could be seen as a provocation. He soon abandoned his hopes in the Japanese liberals,

² Historical works on the Manchurian incident barely mention Taylor and his fleet. The best recent ones are: Armin Rappaport, *Henry L. Stimson and Japan, 1931-33* (Chicago, 1963); Robert H. Ferrell, *American Diplomacy in the Great Depression: Hoover-Stimson Foreign Policy, 1929-1933* (New Haven, 1957); and, on the British side, Christopher Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy: The West, the League and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931-1933* (New York, 1973). For military aspects see Michael D. Reagan, 'The Far Eastern Crisis of 1931-1932: Stimson, Hoover and the Armed Services,' in *American Civil-Military Decisions: A Book of Case Studies*, ed., Harold Stein (Birmingham, Ala., 1963). For Stimson's views see Henry L. Stimson, *The Far Eastern Crisis: Recollections and Observations* (New York, 1936); and Henry L. Stimson and McGeorge Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York, 1947). Admiral Taylor's views are found in his correspondence with the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral W. V. Pratt, in Records of the Chief of Naval Operations—Record Group 45 (hereafter cited as RG 45). Subject File, Box 359, National Archives, Washington, D. C., and in the Montgomery M. Taylor Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. (hereafter cited as Taylor Papers).

and, not wishing to draw Japanese resentment and the threat of war upon the United States, he sought to associate American action with the League of Nations. After the League failed to have any effect, he briefly sought joint action with Britain or France before finally, on 7 January 1932, stating the United States position unilaterally and declaring that the United States would not recognize any situation in China which impaired United States treaty rights or which was brought about by means contrary to the Kellogg-Briand pact. His tactics had changed, but his objectives were the same throughout: to stop Japan.

Admiral Taylor had no interest in stopping Japan. His experience in the Far East lay not in the maintenance of diplomatic principles but in the maintenance of order, and the Chinese had always been the perennial source of disorder on the Asiatic Station. When he took over the command of the Asiatic Fleet on 1 September 1931, he apparently shared the sympathies that many Americans felt for the Chinese, but soon after his arrival he wrote to his brother that the Chinese were 'so lacking in anything approaching national feeling, so prone to desert their post at the least threat, one loses faith in them.'³ After three months of experience with the corruption of the Chinese government and its oppression of the peasantry, his discouragement with the Chinese ripened into contempt: 'Until the Chinese learn to lean on themselves, forget ancestor worship and its attendant ills, forget venality and overcome their moral cowardice, they are going to be the prey of stronger nations.'⁴ He particularly disliked Chinese foreign policy with its frequent appeals to the League of Nations and foreign powers, which he saw as an attempt by China to get someone else to fight her battles. He pointed out that China had over a million men under arms and spent over forty-five percent of her national income on her army and navy, yet allowed ten thousand Japanese to ride roughshod over them in Manchuria while they called on the League for help. In January 1932 he went so far as to say that 'if the failure of the League and the United States to save Manchuria for China convinces her that she must fight her own battles, the loss will be a good thing.'⁵ China, however, was apparently always willing to indulge in petty provocations of other powers, her policy apparently being to nag people into giving her what she wanted. In Manchuria, Taylor continued, China had agreed to build a number of railroads to supplement the Japanese network but instead built one railroad which competed with the Japanese lines and, by drawing its profits from Japanese devel-

³ Admiral M. M. Taylor to Colonel J. R. M. Taylor, 25 September 1931, *Taylor Papers*, Box 2.

⁴ Taylor to Taylor, 12 January 1932, *Taylor Papers*, Box 2.

⁵ Taylor to Pratt, 23 January 1932, RG 45, Box 359.

opments in Manchuria, sought to 'reap what someone else has sown.'⁶ The boycott of Japanese goods was another form of Chinese provocation of the Japanese, and Taylor saw these annoyances as a major cause of the crisis in Manchuria and the unrest in Shanghai. He concluded:

It seems to me that China is too big and has too many possibilities to be able to continue as at present in a world where the search for economic outlets is so keen as at present. I cannot but believe that while in theory Manchuria may remain Chinese, in practice control will be in other hands. . . . There is no doubt in my mind that such control would be to the advantage of all Chinese in Manchuria, but the official parasites now in the country.⁷

Taylor would not admit to being pro-Japanese, but he did believe that Japanese expansion, although in violation of the treaties, was the logical outcome of economic pressures and was thus far more than a *simple case of military aggression*. He saw Japan's problem as twofold: she had a surplus population, and she lacked many natural resources necessary to her prosperity and power. Manchuria provided a solution to some of these problems. Japanese emigrated to Korea and Koreans moved to Manchuria, relieving population pressure in Japan and providing a labor force in Manchuria. The Japanese were developing rice plantations, coal and iron mines, and shale-oil plants in Manchuria to make good some of their most critical deficiencies. The need of the Japanese to invest capital and to trade was resulting in extensive development of Manchuria: the railroad network was large, and much of the railroad profits were reinvested in port facilities, schools, waterworks, model farms and other public works. In view of her extensive interests in the area, Taylor felt that Japan had long intended to get South Manchuria in spite of any treaties or agreements, as she had Korea. He saw, as did Stimson, the Mukden outbreak as premature, brought on by the 'military crowd' as an argument against budget reductions. But he felt that any effort to interfere and reverse the course of events through diplomacy would be futile: 'All in all, Japan has developed the country at so great an expense, has so built it into her economic structure, that I seriously doubt her giving up control except under extreme pressure.'⁸ And any attempt to intervene militarily, at least with the forces on the scene, would be folly—Taylor felt his own fleet was incapable even of defending the Philippines in case of war.

Taylor felt no alarm concerning the impact of Japanese activities on

⁶ Taylor to Pratt, 5 November 1931, RG 45, Box 359.

⁷ Taylor to Pratt, 23 January 1932, RG 45, Box 359. See also Taylor to Pratt, 5 and 25 November 1931, RG 45, Box 359.

⁸ Taylor to Pratt, 5 November 1931, RG 45, Box 359.

American interests in China (which he regarded as very small, especially compared with the British and Japanese), aside from their tendency to provoke antiforeignism among the Chinese. He felt that the fact that Japan had chosen to act in the north, plus the fact that Manchuria was capable of satisfying most of her economic needs, meant that Japan would not entertain any permanent ambitions south of the Great Wall. Elsewhere in China, Taylor tended to associate the Japanese with the Western powers in their conflicts with the Chinese—their interests were similar, and for years the Japanese had cooperated with the Western powers on a local basis in protecting those interests. Taylor might well have agreed with the majority of foreigners in Shanghai who, when the Japanese began diplomatic action against the Chinese there in January 1932, welcomed the move as one taken in behalf of all foreigners in China.⁹

The focus of Taylor's concern during the Far Eastern crisis was not Manchuria but Shanghai, where a large proportion of the Americans and other Westerners in China lived in the International Settlement and where the Chinese agitation against Japan was centered. The Chinese in Shanghai had begun a boycott of Japanese goods in the summer of 1931 and had intensified it after the Mukden incident. The boycott had had a serious impact on Japanese manufacturing and shipping interests in China and was the occasion of chronic small-scale violence on both sides, by Chinese 'committees' enforcing the boycott and by armed Japanese patrols trying to protect merchants who continued to sell their goods. In October, Taylor reported that the situation was very tense: the Japanese were very jumpy, had evacuated many of their nationals from the Yangtse towns, and were ostentatiously reinforcing their naval detachment at Shanghai, which in turn only further excited the Chinese. Taylor feared not only that violence might break out between the two sides, but also that Chinese resentment against the Japanese might broaden into a general antiforeign campaign which might threaten Americans as well. However he saw little that he could do about the situation, for if he reinforced the United States garrison in the International Settlement at Shanghai he would be accused by each side of helping the other. All he could do was to remain neutral 'until our own people are in trouble, then go to it.'¹⁰ This proved unnecessary during the remainder of 1931, for the Chinese neither attacked the Japanese nor extended their campaign

⁹ Taylor to Pratt, 23 January, 24 May and 10 June 1932 and 15 May 1933, RG 45, Box 359; *New York Times*, 29 January 1932, p. 2.

¹⁰ Taylor to Pratt, 12 October 1931, RG 45, Box 359. See also Taylor to Pratt, 6 October, 5 November and 17 December 1931, RG 45, Box 359.

against other foreigners; and in December Taylor wrote that he saw no great need to go north, although he was keeping four destroyers at Manila ready to sail for China at a moment's notice if needed.

Taylor was not at first troubled by a new series of events that broke out in Shanghai in January 1932. On the eighteenth a Chinese mob attacked a party of five Japanese monks, one of whom later died of his injuries. In retaliation a Japanese mob on the twentieth burned down the factory from which the Chinese mob had come, and the Japanese consul general and the naval commander at Shanghai, Rear Admiral Shiozawa Koichi, presented the Chinese mayor of Shanghai with a list of demands which included the closing of all anti-Japanese societies in Shanghai—in effect, the end of the boycott. They backed their demands with a threat of force and a call for reinforcements, which arrived from Japan on the twenty-third and were landed ostentatiously in the International Settlement. Taylor took the news from Shanghai calmly, writing to Admiral Pratt on the day of the landing that:

News has just come of the outbreak in Shanghai, and I imagine the Japanese have been pushed beyond their limit. It would be interesting to be there, but were I to go there is little doubt that the Chinese would broadcast the idea that it was to support them against the Japanese, and in my opinion they have had enough support already.¹¹

Stimson's reaction was very different. Only two weeks previously, on 7 January, he had dispatched to Japan and China the notes containing his doctrine of nonrecognition, and now the Japanese appeared to be considering additional use of force against China. As early as 10 January Stimson had suspected that Japan might respond to the Chinese boycott with a blockade of the Yangtse, and on the twenty-fourth the Consul General in Nanking reported that similar fears were widespread in China and that a strong element in the Nanking government was determined to resist Japan with force, even though the results would probably cause the fall of the Chinese government. Stimson feared that the results of Japanese lawlessness would be the loss by China of her one effective weapon, the boycott, and the collapse of her government, with the result that China would either be forced to arm and become a militarist nation or else would become totally subservient to Japan, while the principles on which world peace rested would be further undermined. In addition, the Consul General at Nanking had asked that additional ships be stationed in Yangtse ports in case it became necessary to evacuate Ameri-

¹¹ Taylor to Pratt, 23 January 1932, RG 45, Box 359.

cans, causing Stimson to fear the effects of Japanese action on American trade and on the security of American citizens in China.¹²

Stimson thought he saw one hopeful element in the situation, however. He felt that the British had refused to associate themselves with his doctrine of nonrecognition because their interests in Manchuria which might suffer from the fighting there were not great enough to warrant risking their entire Far East position in a showdown with Japan. However, British interests in Shanghai were much greater, and Stimson hoped, as he wrote in 1936, that 'this coming threat to the British commerce centered in the valley of the Yangtse would probably at least startle the merchants of Great Britain into a realization of what Japanese aggression towards China ultimately meant to them and . . . we should find British cooperation with us more ready and willing now than we had found it on January 7th. The foundation might thus be laid now for a unity of policy between us.'¹³ Cooperation with the British would have all the benefits that Stimson had earlier sought through cooperation with the League: not only would it add strength to any action taken, but by associating the United States with another power would avoid the danger of Japanese resentment being directed solely against the United States.

In an effort to make Anglo-American cooperation the basis of his response to the situation in Shanghai, Stimson proposed to the British ambassador on 25 January that the two countries take two steps together: protest the Japanese military buildup in Shanghai and send their station fleets to the city to support their diplomatic offensive against Japan. Of the ships he said, 'I thought that their presence in Shanghai would tend, on the one hand, to convince Japan that we were seriously interested in the threat to our trade and our people arising out of the possibility of Japanese action, and also it would have a very wholesome influence on the Chinese themselves in proving that . . . the powers were interested in China and what happened to her.'¹⁴ The British, however, whose attitudes in this regard were similar to Admiral Taylor's, held the Chinese in contempt and sympathized with Japan, and saw no need either to support China or to try to deter Japan. Sir John Pratt of the Foreign Of-

¹² Reagan, 'Far Eastern Crisis,' p. 33; Peck (Nanking) to Stimson, 24 January 1932 (4:00 P.M.), *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter cited as *F.R.U.S.*), 1932, III, 55; Memorandum by the Secretary of State of a conversation with the British Ambassador, 25 January 1932, *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 61; Johnson (American Minister in China) to Stimson, 24 January 1932 (5:00 P.M.), *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 60; Stimson, *Far Eastern Crisis*, pp. 133-37.

¹³ Stimson, *Far Eastern Crisis*, pp. 134-35.

¹⁴ Memorandum by the Secretary of State of a conversation with the British Ambassador, 25 January 1932, *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 61.

fice advised his superiors that 'the American appreciation of the situation is absurdly wide of the mark. There is not the slightest chance either of China becoming a military power or of her potential strength (whatever that may mean!) falling under the control of a foreign power. China is very unlikely to declare war for the simple reason that she is too frightened of Japan to do so; even if she did declare war the results would be nil; nothing would happen, least of all a blockade by Japan.'¹⁵ Taylor agreed as late as 27 January, writing that 'China is up to her old tricks trying to get someone, preferably the United States, to fight her battles for her. Were we to go piling up there they would fill the air with rumors to the effect that help was in sight and "let George do the rest."¹⁶ However, events were soon to change his opinion and that of the British.

On 27 January the Japanese became tired of waiting for the Chinese response to their demands and presented an ultimatum requiring an answer in twenty-two hours or the Japanese navy would take 'appropriate measures.' Both the Chinese and Japanese intensified their military preparations along the borders of the International Settlement. The American Consul General in Shanghai, Edwin S. Cunningham, felt he had sufficient soldiers to protect the American part of the Settlement but feared for American life and property elsewhere. On the twenty-eighth he warned Americans in exposed areas of Shanghai to be ready to move immediately if conditions justified and shortly thereafter asked Taylor for additional naval vessels 'to deter possible Communist disorders, particularly among laborers of the Shanghai Power Company, and also to be a protection in the event of Sino-Japanese disturbances.'¹⁷ This request for protection, endorsed by the senior naval officer in Shanghai, spurred Taylor to action, and early on the twenty-ninth the four destroyers which had been held in ready status at Manila since November for such an emergency sailed for Shanghai. As such moves were within Taylor's traditional prerogatives as commander of the Asiatic Fleet, he acted on his own authority, later reporting his move to Washington.

The British were jolted at the same time, on 28 January, by a note left at the Foreign Office by the Japanese embassy stating that Japan might have to take 'drastic measures' at Shanghai. Realizing that the Japanese might actually carry out their threat and start fighting in the very center

¹⁵ Memorandum by Sir John Pratt (Foreign Office), 26 January 1932; *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* (hereafter cited as *D.B.F.P.*), Ser. 2, IX, Document 120. See also Lindsay (Washington) to Simon, 28 January 1932, *D.B.F.P.*, Ser. 2, IX, Doc. 136.

¹⁶ Taylor to Taylor, 27 January 1932, Taylor Papers, Box 2.

¹⁷ Cunningham (Shanghai) to Stimson, 28 January 1932 (4:00 P.M.), *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 84. See also Cunningham to Stimson, 27 January 1932 (2:00 P.M.) and 28 January 1932 (1:00 and 2:00 P.M.), *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 73-74, 83.

of British interests in China, the British foreign secretary, Sir John Simon, fired off a protest to Tokyo and instructed his ambassador in Tokyo to inform the other ambassadors of it, 'particularly and in the first instance your American colleague.'¹⁸ But violence broke out the following day when, despite Chinese acceptance of the Japanese demands, Japanese troops moved into the Chinese district of Chapei, collided with Chinese troops, and, to everyone's surprise, were stopped by fierce resistance during which the Japanese resorted to artillery and bombing from the air. The British sent a second protest to Tokyo and, now eager for help from the United States, suggested that Stimson make a parallel protest. They also ordered to Shanghai the cruiser *Kent*, with the Commander in Chief China Station, Admiral Sir Howard Kelly, embarked. One foreign office official noted that this was done 'both with an eye to possible criticism here in the event of danger to our interests increasing, and also with an eye to the United States. You will remember that additional ships were Mr. Stimson's point (2) in his telegram of [25 January].'¹⁹ Stimson at once responded by instructing the American ambassador in Tokyo to make a protest similar to the British one and, knowing that four destroyers were already on the way to Shanghai, instructed Taylor to keep the rest of his fleet in readiness to sail and to consult American officials in China with regard to sending additional units.²⁰

The situation in Shanghai continued to deteriorate. Armed Japanese patrols, disregarding boundaries established in the joint defense plan for the settlement, roamed the American and British sectors searching buildings, setting up strong points, and threatening to touch off a conflict with the American garrison at any moment. Meanwhile the use of the settlement by the Japanese as a military base increased the likelihood of a retaliatory attack by the Chinese, while the unexpected weakness of the Japanese increased the possibility that the Chinese might be able to break through and overrun the settlement.²¹ The following day, now

¹⁸ Simon to Lindley (Tokyo), 28 January 1932, *D.B.F.P.*, Ser. 2, IX, Doc. 139. See also *Aide-Memoire* from British Embassy to State Department, delivered 29 January 1932, *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 93.

¹⁹ Simon to Lindsay, 29 January 1932, *D.B.F.P.*, Ser. 2, IX, Doc. 156 with note. See also Simon to Lindley and Simon to Lindsay, 29 January 1932, *D.B.F.P.*, Ser. 2, IX, Docs. 154-55.

²⁰ Stimson to Forbes (Japan), 29 January 1932, *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States: Japan: 1931-1932*, I, 165; State Department memorandum on the Shanghai situation, 30 January 1932, Records of the Department of State—Record Group 59 (hereafter cited as RG 59), Decimal File 793.94/4437; *New York Times*, 29 January 1932, p. 1.

²¹ Cunningham to Stimson, 30 January 1932 (4:00 and 7:00 p.m.); Hooker to Taylor, 30 January 1932; Peck to Stimson, 30 January 1932; and Stimson to Cunningham, 31 January 1932; *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, IX, 116, 132, 119, 121, 135. See also Taylor to Pratt, 6 February 1932, RG 45, Box 359.

seriously alarmed over the possibility of a 'massacre of foreigners in the International Settlement by [an] undisciplined Chinese horde,' London ordered another cruiser, *Berwick*, to embark a battalion of troops and a battery of artillery and to proceed posthaste to Shanghai. They also urged the American government to take similar measures and 'urgently reinforce their fighting strength at Shanghai.'²² Stimson welcomed the sudden desire of the British for cooperation, as it not only fit his diplomatic plans but also enabled him to satisfy the demands from Americans in China for protection. Requests from the American Consul General in Nanking and from the Texas Oil Company's plant near Shanghai had been followed by an urgent message, received early on 30 January, in which Consul General Cunningham in Shanghai abandoned his earlier belief that the American troops in the settlement were sufficient: 'I have now decided that the exigencies justify my requesting that the landing forces from American vessels be increased at the earliest moment possible.'²³ On receipt of news of the British move, Stimson conferred with the President and then had Admiral Pratt send Taylor his sailing orders: 'Due to the grave danger to lives of foreigners residing in Shanghai as a result of recent operations undertaken there and for their protection at that place and other river ports, you are directed to sail for Shanghai immediately with the *Houston* and such destroyers as are available.'²⁴ Within hours new fighting at Shanghai and a new message from Cunningham that 'truce no longer obtains. Rush supplementary naval forces' made additional troops seem necessary, and a transport which happened to be at Manila was ordered to embark a thousand men of the Army's 31st Infantry Regiment and sail for Shanghai.²⁵ Despite the urgency of the military situation, however, Stimson never lost sight of his diplomatic plan, and he saw to it that the joint movement of Anglo-American forces to Shanghai was accompanied on 1 February by a joint Anglo-American diplomatic move: he and the British agreed to accept a Japanese request to mediate the dispute, provided the Japanese met five conditions set by Stimson.²⁶ Thus while Taylor's orders were worded in traditional terms

²² Atherton (London) to Stimson, 31 January 1932 (noon), *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 140.

²³ Cunningham to Stimson, 30 January 1932 (8:00 P.M.), *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 133. See also Peck to Johnson, 30 January 1932 (repeated to State Department 31 January), RG 59, Decimal File 393.11/1402; T. Rieber (Vice President, Texaco Inc.) to E. L. Jahncke (Assistant Secretary of the Navy), 30 January 1932, General Correspondence of the Department of the Navy—Record Group 80 (hereafter cited as RG 80), file EF16/Pg-2, National Archives, Washington, D. C.

²⁴ Pratt to Taylor, 31 January 1932 (8:58 A.M.), RG 80, file EF16/Pg-2.

²⁵ Cunningham to Stimson, 1 February 1932 (1:00 A.M.), *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 152.

²⁶ Memoranda of telephone conversations, 1 February 1932, 10:15 A.M., 11:20 A.M. and 12:30 P.M., *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 153, 158, 159.

concerning the protection of Americans, he also had another function at Shanghai: to represent by his presence alongside the British ships the joint Anglo-American front against Japan.

Taylor never received any explicit guidance on the diplomatic part of his mission—his sailing orders and the supplementary instructions he received to assure the British of '100 percent naval and military cooperation with them in preserving the neutrality and safety of the International Settlement at Shanghai' seemed fully consistent with the tradition of the cooperation of foreign forces against the Chinese.²⁷ However the ambiguity in his instructions made little difference, for the realities that he confronted when he arrived at Shanghai in *Houston* on the afternoon of 3 February quickly showed him that the activities of the Japanese had entirely altered the problem.

Houston was still mooring to her buoy off Shanghai when Taylor's first visitors, Consul General Cunningham and the American troop commander, Colonel Hooker, came on board to report. Most Westerners in Shanghai had originally viewed the Japanese as a responsible, essentially Western power reluctantly trying to keep order in China on behalf of all foreigners, but they had changed their minds during the first days of the fighting, at first angered when the Japanese attacked the Chinese despite agreement by the Chinese to their demands, and then appalled when the Japanese bombed the heavily populated Chinese district of Chapei from the air. Cunningham and Hooker now told Taylor that the Japanese actions were largely responsible for the danger to foreigners in the International Settlement. Japanese artillery shells which passed over their targets sometimes landed in the American sector of the settlement, while Japanese positions in and aircraft flying over the settlement drew Chinese fire, some of which also fell in the American sector. The Chinese claimed that the flagrant use of the settlement by the Japanese as a military base was sufficient justification for the Chinese to attack and overrun the area. The Japanese responded, not by limiting their military operations, but by sending out trigger-happy armed patrols to search the settlement, including the American and British sectors, for snipers. Several innocent Chinese civilians had been killed, and American marines had arrested several Japanese patrols in the American sector. The Japanese thus appeared not only to be provoking an attack from the Chinese but also to be raising the possibility of a clash between Japanese and American forces.²⁸

²⁷ Pratt to Taylor, 3 February 1932, *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 200.

²⁸ Most of the details of Taylor's thoughts and activities in Shanghai and the reports he received are in a chronological summary labeled 'Outlines of Action,' Taylor Papers, Box 3.

Any doubts that Taylor may still have entertained after receiving these reports were dispelled a few hours after his arrival when the destroyer *Parrott*, moored at the Texas Oil pier near the Woosung forts which the Japanese were bombarding, radioed that she was being fired upon. Taylor immediately sent an officer to the Japanese flagship to demand an end to the firing near *Parrott*, and, while he quickly realized that the Japanese had not been firing deliberately on the American ship, the disregard of the Japanese for American life and property was now clear for all to see. His opinion of the Chinese did not improve, although he did credit them with willingness to observe the neutrality of the settlement if the Japanese did likewise. However his opinion of the Japanese plummeted, and he now likened the position of the foreigner in Shanghai to that of 'the innocent bystander in a gangster fight,' with little to choose between the two belligerents.²⁹

Taylor thus found that his main problem was with the Japanese, not the Chinese, and this made the traditional reliance on a show of force by his fleet both useless and dangerous: useless because the size of the Japanese navy would make any demonstration by Taylor's small force militarily absurd, and dangerous because war might result if the Japanese called the bluff. The only alternative he could find was a posture of complete diplomatic impartiality. He stationed his ships at trouble spots in Shanghai and up the Yangtse, protested immediately and firmly whenever the fighting endangered American lives and property, but kept his distance from the diplomatic aspects of the dispute. He was fully aware of his limited capabilities and depreciated efforts of the press to picture him as a hero, protesting that 'there is nothing spectacular about my present duty, and it consists mainly of watching for violations of that part of the Settlement under our control and protesting against them.' He characterized his 'sole job out here' as 'sitting tight.'³⁰ Fortunately circumstances conspired to make his policy successful, for the Japanese realized they had overextended themselves militarily and were urgently trying to avoid any diplomatic complications that might add to their problems. Thus the Japanese response to Taylor's protests of shellings and other incidents was prompt and effective, and they were clearly as eager to avoid any new incidents as were the Americans and the British.³¹

Taylor's relations with the Japanese were greatly facilitated by the

²⁹ Taylor to Pratt, 6 February 1932, RG 45, Box 359; 'Outlines of Action' for 3 February 1932, Taylor Papers, Box 3.

³⁰ Taylor to Taylor, 24 February 1932, Taylor Papers, Box 2. See also Taylor to Taylor, 21 March and 19 April 1932, Taylor Papers, Box 2.

³¹ Taylor to Pratt, 20 February 1932, RG 45, Box 359.

arrival on 5 February of an old acquaintance, Vice Admiral Nomura Kichisaburo, to take over command of all Japanese forces at Shanghai. Taylor had not thought much of the previous Japanese commander, Rear Admiral Shiozawa, who had, he felt, blundered badly in beginning the operation with insufficient forces and in carrying it on with unnecessary callousness.³² However, he knew Nomura well from Nomura's days in Washington as naval attaché during World War I and as a delegate to the Washington Conference in 1921-1922. Admiral Pratt also knew Nomura and instructed Taylor to present his compliments when they met.³³ Nomura returned the cordial relations, sending Taylor a gift shortly after his arrival and another shortly before Taylor's departure. Taylor wrote that he thought things might have gone differently if Nomura had been in charge at Shanghai from the start and later contrasted Nomura and other naval officers who had had extensive contact with the West with Japanese army officers, particularly the Minister of War, General Araki Sadao, who, he said, were like the Japanese of the caricature, provincial and militaristic.³⁴

New problems arose for Taylor when the British Commander in Chief, Kelly, arrived in *Kent* on 5 February. It soon developed that Kelly was not satisfied with 'sitting tight' but wanted to take an active role in ending the fighting. When Kelly arrived, a Japanese boarding officer came aboard *Kent* and asked that Admiral Shiozawa be excused 'due to pressure of important business' from the call traditionally made by a junior commander upon the arrival of a senior one. Taylor had granted a similar request, but Kelly refused and stated that he wanted to see the Japanese admiral. When, after one reminder, Shiozawa came aboard *Kent*, Kelly took him (and London) aback by threatening to shoot down any Japanese aircraft that flew over British warships. The conversation soon calmed down, and Shiozawa indicated that Japan would be willing to cease military operations in Chapei if the Chinese would evacuate that area. Kelly grasped at the statement, and the following night a conference was held at the British consulate in which the Chinese were induced to drop their demand that any truce include an agreement on Manchuria as well as Shanghai. However the Japanese deadlocked the negotiations the following day by demanding that the Chinese not only pull out of Chapei but also withdraw a distance of twenty miles from Shanghai. Despite

³² Taylor to Pratt, 6 February 1932, RG 45, Box 359.

³³ *New York Times*, 4 February 1932, p. 13. Taylor was not pleased to see naval messages like this in the press: Taylor to Pratt, 6 February and 4 April 1932, RG 45, Box 359.

³⁴ Taylor to Nomura, 14 February 1932, and Taylor to Pratt, 6 March and 15 June 1932, RG 45, Box 359.

his disappointment, Kelly persisted in his efforts to prevent further fighting.³⁵

Taylor was very cautious in his reaction to Kelly's initiative. In spite of prodding from the American minister to China, he did not personally become involved in the peace efforts but was satisfied to maintain contact through frequent visits made to him by Kelly's Chief of Staff. When Taylor visited *Kent* on 7 February to return the call made by Kelly the previous day, he went so far as to encourage the British troop commander to agree to the neutral patrol force which many felt the Japanese would demand as part of a cease-fire, and he ordered the American military commanders to draw up plans for their share in such a force. He also recommended to Cunningham that the military and diplomatic parts of the truce negotiations be separated in order to hasten the end of the fighting. However, although his objectives were the same as those of the British, he avoided further association with Kelly's efforts because he felt they were hopeless: the Japanese were bent on a military victory to regain the face they had lost when they were stopped in Chapei, while the Chinese were flushed with victory and would not give any concessions at all. He avoided pressing Admiral Nomura on the subject of a cease-fire when the new Japanese commander called on 9 February, although Kelly had suggested that he do so.³⁶

Taylor and the British commander were in fact not as far apart in their views as they seemed. Taylor gained an appreciation for the British viewpoint, and that of most local businessmen of all nationalities, when on 16 February he visited a Shanghai banker who told him that as long as the Chinese held out and fighting continued in the city business at Shanghai would remain at a standstill, causing a loss of revenue not only to foreign investors but also to the Chinese government, while the threat to foreign lives and property from mobs of unemployed workers and from military action would be prolonged. In turn, Taylor felt that Kelly had come to appreciate his viewpoint on the impracticability of a negotiated truce after the deadlock of his first peace initiative, and the two agreed that, as a Chinese victory would involve an invasion of the settlement and was in any case unlikely, the best thing that could happen would be for the Japanese to bring in sufficient forces to drive the Chinese, and the fighting, away from the city. The American and British consuls in Shang-

³⁵ 'Outlines of Action' for 6-9 February 1932, Taylor Papers, Box 3; Lindley to Simon and Vansittart to Lindley, 6 February 1932, *D.B.F.P.*, Ser. 2, IX, Docs. 350, 351.

³⁶ 'Outlines of Action' for 6-9 February 1932, Taylor Papers, Box 3; Taylor to Pratt, 6 and 20 February 1932, RG 45, Box 359; Lampson to Kelly, 6 February 1932, *D.B.F.P.*, Ser. 2, IX, Doc. 359; Johnson to Stimson, 6 February 1932, *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 241.

hai and the American minister to China also reportedly agreed with this view, although even a local Japanese victory was hardly consistent with the long-term moral position taken by Secretary Stimson.³⁷ Taylor retained this view right to the end, which came on 1 March when a Japanese landing up the river finally turned the Chinese flank and forced them to withdraw from the city. A truce was then quickly arranged on board *Kent* the following day.³⁸

With the fighting over and diplomats meeting in Shanghai to resolve the conflict, Taylor felt that his mission in the city was over. On 9 March he recommended to the Navy Department that the 31st Regiment be withdrawn, and Consul General Cunningham sent a similar recommendation to the State Department. But Stimson thought differently. His efforts to achieve serious Anglo-American diplomatic cooperation over Shanghai had fallen apart almost immediately after the fleet had been sent on 31 January. The British, beginning to believe that Japan would not easily be deterred from achieving her aims in China and alarmed by a report from their ambassador in Tokyo that 'a single false step may precipitate catastrophe,' began to back away from their anti-Japanese position.³⁹ On the other hand, Stimson believed that the Japanese had seriously overextended themselves in China and felt that the time had come to press for a solution both in Shanghai and in Manchuria.⁴⁰ The two countries were unable to agree on any joint moves after the Japanese rejected the Anglo-American terms for good offices on 4 February, and ultimately on 25 February Stimson unilaterally made his moral disapproval of Japanese actions known in an open letter to Senator Borah. The only remaining evidence of Anglo-American cooperation, as well as the only material evidence of American determination in the Far East, was the ships and troops in Shanghai. Stimson quickly replied to the recommendations of Taylor and Cunningham that the government was trying to cooperate with other powers both in the defense of Shanghai and in certain other diplomatic objectives, that the time had not yet come for a withdrawal, and that no action should be taken in that regard without first consulting with the other powers in-

³⁷ 'Outlines of Action' for 16 February 1932, Taylor Papers, Box 3; Taylor to Pratt, 6 and 20 February and 6 March 1932, RG 45, Box 359; Brennan (Shanghai) to Holmes (Peking), 9 February 1932, *D.B.F.P.*, Ser. 2, IX, Doc. 395. The British Minister to China disagreed: Lampson to Brennan, 10 February 1932, *D.B.F.P.*, Ser. 2, IX, Doc. 410.

³⁸ 'Outlines of Action' for 18 February to 3 March 1932, Taylor Papers, Box 3.

³⁹ Lindley to Simon, 3 February 1932, *D.B.F.P.*, Ser. 2, IX, Doc. 274.

⁴⁰ Memorandum of telephone conversation, Stimson and Simon, 2 February 1932 (1:05 P.M.), *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 179.

volved.⁴¹ Taylor was baffled by the reply and confessed as much to the Army commander in the Philippines when informing him of the decision: 'I told the Navy Department that in my opinion the 31st could go back to Manila, but was turned down for some unexplained reason. I am still of that opinion, but apparently some deep reason of diplomacy makes their stay necessary.'⁴² The troops were not released by Washington until the end of June, although Taylor was able to get most of his ships back to Manila well before that time.

Washington was pleased with the performance of Taylor and his fleet during the crisis. Secretary of the Navy Charles F. Adams congratulated Taylor on his getting through the Shanghai affair 'without creating any unnecessary trouble for our government or for the Navy. . . . We were certainly happy that we had you instead of some excitable gentleman on the job. It wouldn't have taken much hard luck or much hasty judgment to have developed a war between Japan and ourselves.'⁴³ The State Department had also found Taylor and his fleet useful, both in providing protection to Americans in China and as an element of Secretary Stimson's effort to coordinate the American and British responses to the outbreak at Shanghai through joint diplomatic and military moves. Taylor and his fleet had responded promptly to Stimson's call, and it was not their fault that high-level Anglo-American cooperation fell apart almost as soon as it was agreed upon or that Stimson's diplomatic objectives had been only imperfectly achieved.

Taylor was not so pleased with Washington's performance, however. He felt that American policy makers, in concentrating on the diplomatic aspects of the problem, had failed to see a basic difference between West and East: while the former was pacifist, the latter was militaristic. Specifically, 'while international differences between Western nations may be settled by agreement and legal argument, in my opinion out here the ability to utilize force is what counts.'⁴⁴ Taylor criticized Stimson for attempting to influence events in the Far East without having force behind him, for the forces on the scene were too small to make any impression on the Japanese, while public statements had made it clear that

⁴¹ Memorandum, Hornbeck to Stimson, 11 March 1932, RG 59, Decimal File 793.94/4762; Stimson to Cunningham, 11 March 1932, *F.R.U.S.*, 1932, III, 572; Stimson to Johnson, 6 May 1932, RG 59, Decimal File, 793.94/5161; Taylor to Pratt, 4 April 1932, RG 45, Box 359; Reagan, 'Far Eastern Crisis,' p. 37.

⁴² Taylor to Hines, 21 March 1932, Taylor Papers, Box 2.

⁴³ Adams to Taylor, 11 May 1932, Taylor Papers, Box 2.

⁴⁴ Taylor to Pratt, 4 April and 10 December 1932, RG 45, Box 359. See also Taylor to Taylor, 25 February 1933, Taylor Papers, Box 3.

neither the President nor the public would go to war over a Far Eastern dispute. For his own part, faced by these facts and his own lack of desire to stop Japan, Taylor found that there was little he could do at Shanghai. While his forces had been well suited for use against the Chinese, they were useless against the Japanese, and it was only due to the diplomatic preoccupations of the latter that Taylor's protests had had any effect. While the Asiatic Fleet remained in Chinese waters until the outbreak of World War II, it had lost its ability to influence events in China or even, as the *Panay* incident showed, to guarantee the safety of Americans. Since 1932 the global range of great power confrontations, plus the subsequent rise of third-world nationalism, have profoundly altered the conditions under which naval forces are used overseas during peacetime.

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